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291

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: China's Attitude Toward Multilateral Agreements

Background and Summary

1. Since its re-emergence on the international scene early in this decade, China has been extremely wary about becoming involved in almost all types of multilateral agreements. This wariness stems primarily from the Chinese view that multinational proposals are frequently manipulated by the two "superpowers"--the US and the USSR--for their own benefit and as a means of limiting Peking's freedom of action. This attitude is strengthened by China's self-styled role as one of the Third World countries, many of which share the view that the "superpowers" have attempted to use multilateral proposals to institutionalize special privileges.

2. Peking's opportunities for direct participation in multilateral affairs were severely limited until 1971 when China became a UN member. In the past five years, China's attitude in the UN, as well as in other forums such as the Law of the Sea Conference, has been based on a jealous regard for its sovereignty and a firm resistance to interference from outside powers. Peking's record in these bodies has, therefore, been largely negative. Concrete proposals have been virtually nonexistent, while criticism of the US and--more especially--the USSR is frequent and bitter.

3. China has consistently opposed all proposals for nuclear weapons test bans and for arms control and disarmament which do not seek to destroy the stockpiles and cease the production of weapons by the US and USSR. China's opposition continues under the new leadership in Peking.

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SECRET

4. China anathematizes defense-related multilateral agreements because it fears those agreements are designed to freeze China and other developing countries into defense positions permanently inferior to the US and USSR. Peking denounces the "nuclear monopoly by the superpowers" and justifies its own testing of nuclear weapons by asserting that China is trying to break that monopoly and pave the way for eventual real, not "sham," disarmament.

5. China showed some slight interest in a treaty to prohibit the development, production and stockpiling of biological and chemical weapons. But even that interest ran aground on China's objection to Taipei's signature on the biological weapons convention in 1972. Peking is uninterested in subscribing to any treaty to which the Nationalist government is a signatory, since to sign itself would tend to admit the existence of "two Chinas."

6. Where China's own defense is not directly involved --for example, proposals for the creation of nuclear weapons free zones in other parts of the world--the Chinese have taken a somewhat more flexible position.

Nuclear Weapons Test Bans

7. The Chinese leadership has for years devoted considerable resources to its nuclear weapons program.

[REDACTED] with each test, the Chinese have issued a standard announcement, designed for maximum political advantage, along the following lines:

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The conducting of necessary and limited nuclear tests and development of nuclear weapons by China is entirely for the purposes of defense, for breaking the nuclear monopoly by the superpowers and for the ultimate abolition of nuclear weapons. At no time and under no circumstances will China be the first to use nuclear weapons. China is prepared to "make common efforts with other peoples and peace-loving countries" to achieve complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons.

8. Determined to increase their military defenses against the USSR and any other potential adversary, the Chinese have repeatedly derided the 1963 tripartite

partial nuclear test ban treaty and the recent treaty on underground nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes as "swindles" and "frauds." Peking's opposition to the underground tests agreement is not to our knowledge based on any disapproval of underground testing per se. Peking asserts that test bans are meaningless if weapons production continues and stockpiles are not destroyed. Test bans are viewed as a means to perpetuate the nuclear superiority of the "superpowers" over nuclear latecomers. Peking asserts that the surest way to convince the "superpowers" to give up their weapons is for more countries to have them.

Arms Control and Disarmament

9. Peking has dismissed all proposals for disarmament as designed to hide the "desperate arms expansion" of the US and USSR, particularly the latter. The Chinese pointedly ask the Soviets why, if they are interested in disarmament, they refuse--at a minimum--to renounce the first use of nuclear weapons. Given this Soviet refusal, the Chinese are reluctant even to discuss the question of disarmament.

--Publicly and officially, Peking has also denounced the SALT talks, on the grounds that it sees no genuine arms control arrangements in the negotiations. The Chinese point to the fact the US had not yet even reached the ceiling set for strategic weapons carriers in the Vladivostok talks. In fact, the Chinese do not appear to be strongly opposed to the SALT negotiations, especially to the initial round concluded in 1972. Peking is, however, extremely sensitive to any indication that the two superpowers are prepared to enter into an agreement that, while limiting the strategic forces arrayed against each other, would permit the targeting of greater strategic resources against China.

--In 1972, China declared it would not participate in the World Disarmament Conference unless the co-chairmen of the conference--the US and USSR--both pledged not to be the first to use nuclear weapons and to remove their military forces from foreign bases.

--This year, the Chinese delegate to the UN denounced the latest Soviet proposals for disarmament as a cover-up of intensified arms expansion, that could only spread "illusions" about the prospects for peace.

Nuclear Weapons Free Zones

10. Especially since 1974, Peking has responded favorably to proposals for the creation of nuclear weapons free zones in areas where China's defense is not directly involved. In general, China supports nuclear weapons free zone proposals put forth by the nations of those zones. Peking found it easy to subscribe to the Latin American nuclear weapon free zone treaty of 1974, particularly since the USSR alone among the nuclear powers refused to sign the treaty's protocol promising not to introduce nuclear weapons into the area. Peking has since regularly scored Moscow on this point.

--In 1974 also, China accepted the principle of a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East, but some of the details of the Iranian proposal did not win Peking's support. In South Asia, following on India's first nuclear explosion, China voiced interest in proposals by Pakistan and Sri Lanka for a nuclear weapons free zone while noting India's equivocation on the issue. Peking has also noted approvingly that prior to China's admission to the UN, the General Assembly endorsed a nuclear weapons free zone in Africa.

--More recently, Peking has directed its attention to the creation of an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace, aimed less at indigenous nuclear weapons in the littoral states than at foreign military--particularly Soviet--forces in the region. Despite the public position, however, the Chinese have made it clear in numerous conversations with foreign officials that so long as Soviet forces have access to the region they tacitly support the US military presence in the area as a counterweight.

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Multilateral Agreements

11. A prominent example of China's approach to multilateral agreements is China's participation in the Law of the Sea Conference. Peking's underlying position there embodies the same anti-"superpower" suspicion it brings to arms negotiations, combined with an extreme aversion to perceived infringements on national sovereignty. To date, Peking has championed the demands of the less developed countries for 200-mile exclusive

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economic zones, sovereignty of littoral states over international straits, and majority rule in the conference, rather than consensus rule; which it sees as strengthening the voice of the USSR and US.

12. In short, the Chinese record is essentially both rigid and negative. Peking's vociferous public opposition over many years to a wide range of proposals for multilateral agreements on various aspects of the arms control problem is matched by private disinclination even to explore seriously the ramifications of the problem. It has subscribed to proposals for nuclear-free zones only when its own interests are not directly involved, and in such cases it has not attempted to turn these proposals into reality through concerted diplomatic effort, and in fact in private it has condoned developments that tend to undercut these proposals in the interests of "realpolitik."

13. This record is that of a nation that is acutely conscious that it is militarily vastly inferior to the two superpowers--the two nations it fears most and with which it believes it is most likely to come into conflict. The Chinese position on disarmament and arms control proposals in particular is clearly designed to preserve for Peking the greatest possible leeway in building its own strategic arsenal--a long and expensive process. Its position on these matters has survived essentially unchanged through the series of kaleidoscopic political changes in Peking of the past decade. It is likely to remain unchanged so long as China considers itself to be weak and vulnerable. Only when Peking believes itself to be a first-rate military power--even if not a superpower itself--are major changes in this rigid posture likely to occur.

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